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指導教授：蕭笛雷
RAPHAEL SCHULTE

謝默斯·黑倪詩中自我定位、否定和藝術之衝突
SELF-JUSTIFICATION AND SELF-OBLITERATION
IN SEAMUS HEANEY'S POEMS

研究生：朱鳳蓮
OPHELIA FENG-LIN CHU

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Chapter Three

Conflicts between Aesthetics and Self-Justification

In chapter two I argued that self-obliteration confronts the crises of aesthetic faith. The journey pattern of "Station Island" exhibits conflicts between the solidarity spirit and self-obliteration. In fact, aesthetics rejects reconciliations with tribalism and reveals that tribal loyalty twists human nature. The darkness image reflects the fear of losing faith in life, and aesthetics as an organic source is cast in doubt.

The previous chapter examined that Heaney questions the blindness of self-sacrifice and the aesthetic consciousness. In this chapter, my focus is that self-justification conflicts with release and the personal space lacks a unified force. According to Fredrich Nietzsche, power and dogmatic approaches, insofar as they are designed to be followed by all, only succeed in establishing values addressing the blind faith of people (*The Will to Power* 546). Nietzsche urges the proliferation of different approaches to life and values; he believes that there is no single overarching approach. Therefore, the world is indeterminate because it is in flux. It is from Nietzsche's illustrations of the world of appearance that I discuss the tensions between transcendence and the impossibilities of transcendence.

Regarding Sweeney, Heaney argues that aesthetics conflicts with communal pressure. Heaney questions his archaeologist identity to associate voices of oppressed people and balance beauty with atrocity. Actually, Adorno's expression of poetry as an antagonism challenges social manipulation. Art for Adorno illuminates aspects of social

reality; lyric poetry irreconcilably "does not chime in with society" and "the subject whose expression is successful reaches an accord with language itself, with the inherent tendency of language" ("On Lyric Poetry and Society" 43). In the poems "Station Island," *Sweeney Astray* and "Squarings" in *Seeing Things* I argue that aesthetics is socially bound, and through the frustrated desire to be free from social restrictions, Heaney justifies personal spaces and questions the concept of transcendence.

In "Squarings" poem xxiv Heaney expresses the senses of harmony and reconciliation. Yet, the fragments convey the power of destruction and its resulting incompleteness. The ideal of peace is questionable. Nietzsche states in *The Will to Power*; "If the world had a goal, it must have been reached" (546). He stresses that the attempt to equalize any action is a way to obliterate actions. Thus, what the world reflects is the opposite of equilibrium and peace, since the world is always in the state of becoming and transient changing. Visions presented through the poet's insight and facets of the diverse presentations are encountered as crossroads.

David Brian Perrin expands the dimension of vision and absence to include the aspect of being. He suggests that descriptions of the world include not only descriptive reference but also nondescriptive references. The metaphorical "seeing-as" in the vision or the non-visions accomplished through correlations with ontological levels of "being-as" (70). This process of connection brings "a new congruence in the organization of events." Therefore, Perrin suggests that "the delineation between poetic composition and narrative is unstable" (71). Catharine

Malloy in "Seamus Heaney's *Seeing Things*: 'Retracing the path back . . .'" observes that Heaney's "seeing" forms discursive movements. She writes, "'Seeing,' for the poet, involves moving ahead and turning back through the back-and-forthness, the resonances of language" (170). What Malloy suggests here is that the discursive effect of discourses are constructed from the poet's memory and "this seesawing forces him to retrieve scenes and things from his memory" (170). Thus, Malloy's observance of the language movements explains Perrin's justification that the narratives are unstable.

In poem xxiv, Heaney portrays the harmonic scene of a seashore. He describes the balance of harmony juxtaposed with the world's incompleteness and frustrations. The stillness of the ocean seems to transcend the imperfection of the fragmented objects on the shore. In the last stanza, the poet displays harmony at the sight of the peaceful ocean and land:

Air and ocean known as antecedents
Of each other. In apposition with
Omnipresence, equilibrium, brim. (*Seeing Things* 80)

Helen Vendler mentions that the phrases "antecedents, apposition, equilibrium" signify the peace of the "perfected vision." The sense of transcendence is also expressed through the "Latin prefixes (*ante*, *ad*-, and *equi*-) and incorporate beforeness, witness, and balancedness" (*The Breaking of Style* 46). These nouns imply the reconciliation of differences. The harbour suggests a sort of "reanimation of the past" and imposes the conceptualized imagination of the future. Heaney expresses the harmony, balance and peace in writing the noun phrases.

In fact, the language indicates the sense of eternality and equilibrium, but simultaneously reflects the other truth of constant changes. While the poet brings our attention to the height of the "minarets," he also mentions "shell-debris" and "every stone clarified and dormant" under the flowing water (*Seeing Things* 80). The sight of fragments brings in reality and contrasts with the sense of transcendence in the existential sphere. Therefore, through the sight of the fragments, phrases that point to a future ideal peace are reconditioned. The relics and debris mark changings of things and the differences in time. These clustered things reflect the frustrated human world and question the equilibrium. The differences and the interactions keep the world in constant flux.

According to these changing movements, in "Squarings" poem xlvii Heaney indicates that the power of art is like flowing music with the lucid beauty of simplicity. Through the "airiness" (Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* 136) of the beauty in music, the speaker convincingly perceives "extravagance" in ordinary life (*Seeing Things* 106). The music mentioned in poem xlvii transmits a sense of release. Art in this aesthetics justifies hope amid the existence of flux. While one cannot deny the fact of mortal life, the sources of beauty and extravagance not only survive, but also are rooted in life. The delight of extravagance and intoxication flows to him:

And in a slated house the fiddle going

Like a flat stone skimmed at sunset

Or the irrevocable slipstream of flat earth

Still fleeing behind space.

Was music once a proof of God's existence?

As long as it admits things beyond measure,

That supposition stands. (*Seeing Things* 106)

The speaker imagines that the flowing of music is like the light of sunset. The delight of listening to music inspires imaginations. Heaney uses the word "fleeing" and suggests the sense of feeling released. In fact, Heaney strives to justify the idea of beauty and pleasure in art. Nietzsche's *The Will to Power* asserts that the aesthetic "intoxication" and heterogeneity support the affirmation of life (428):

What is essential in art remains its perfection of existence, its production of perfection and plentitude; art is essentially affirmation, blessing, deification of existence . . . To present terrible and questionable things is in itself an instinct for power and magnificence in an artist: he does not fear them - There is no such thing as pessimistic art - Art affirms. (434-435)

The passage exemplifies that the feeling of enhanced power flourished with the pleasure of aesthetic justification. Thus, art is not the reproduction of moral duties manipulated by the artist but is like the flowing music in the air, art is the source of "potentiation" by which we can "assert ourselves over" and against the apparent negativity of existence (Vattimo 99).

Art presents negations against life's emptiness; in "Station Island" Heaney exhibits a view of aesthetic transformation. The power of the

imagination transforms and shapes the ordinary with more than the usual state of perception and judgement. This is to say that art transgresses indifferences in the common life. Aesthetics achieves a state of awareness. In poem X of "Station Island," the materials of aesthetic experience are indeed daily seen, but seldom are they seen in their aesthetic significance.

Therefore, as a receiver and a creator, Heaney re-justifies the world of appearances and renders it more aesthetically intelligible. In poem X of "Station Island," while Heaney feels disturbed and lost in other pilgrim's hustle-bustle to determine a new day's route, he recalls the vision of a mug. In this noisy and rough moment of leaving, he perceives the plain material that has "stood for years / in its patient sheen and turbulent atoms, / unchallenging, unremembered *lars* . . ." (*Station Island* 87). The freshness of his vision is closely related to aesthetic awareness. He says, ". . . I seemed to waken to and waken from" (*Station Island* 87). Such a notion is revealed when Heaney can hardly remember the mug until it was connected with the drama and actors.

There he sees the beauty of familiarity and appreciates the commonplace in life. The object is transformed into a "loving cup" in a play, and when it is returned to the kitchen shelf, it has a different air about it. In the poem, the speaker juxtaposes the aesthetic transformation with the story of Sweeney. According to history, Saint Ronan's Psalter was thrown in the lough water by Sweeney. Yet the Psalter was miraculously recovered and left unharmed by an otter. Here, the mug in the childhood memory has undergone an imaginative sea change. Heaney is drawing a parallel with sacramentalism and sees art as having a similar

transformative effect. The mug that was for years ignored is transformed into the sacred sign of love in the stage performances. This association between an object and art reveals that aesthetics is expressive but hidden in life. Thus, aesthetics makes the ordinariness "strange" and translates it into an intensified realm seemingly more directly expressed in art than life itself. The vision of the mug highlights Heaney's sense of art as something homely and natural.

According to Theodor Adorno, aesthetics not only transforms the ordinariness of life resulting from indifferent and passive contemplation, but also justifies the notion that freedom cannot forsake the context of social experiences. He states in *Prisms*:

What can be called human freedom constitutes itself solely in man's efforts to break the bondage of nature. If this is ignored, if the world is treated as a pure manifestation of the pure essence of man, freedom becomes lost in the exclusively human character of history. Freedom develops only through the resistance of the existent; if freedom is posited as absolute and souldom is raised to a governing principle, that principle itself falls prey to the merely existent. (69)

Adorno argues that there is no pure freedom. Rather, his philosophy of art displays a philosophy of social explanation that resists political totality and manipulation. The concept of "freedom" exists with the bond of history and resists manipulation with dissonance.

Despite Adorno's refusal to accept social suppression upon human nature, he does not defend art by idealizing it. Gregg Horowitz suggests that in defending a dialectical interpretation of the autonomy of art,

Adorno develops a philosophy of sociohistorical explanation and he objects to the point of view that is detached from the history it explains (262). In constructing critical history, according to Adorno, freedom exists with the counterbalance of contrasts. This is the reason Horowitz stresses the self-conscious and dialectal history:

Dialectical self consciousness, or self-criticism, is but another name for the refusal of any externally *determined* proper place in the historical totality; it is, in other words, a form of opposition to a given state of society . . . (263)

The passage suggests that self-conscious historiography strives to stage the conflict between itself and its determinants standing opposed to society. Thus, this formulation makes legible the contradictions within art and the tension between art and society. To put it differently, freedom in art involves a state of existence and consistent conflicts.

Thus, to write not only rejects blind accord with social mechanisms, but also battles reconciliation, such as with "the death-temptation" (Vendler, *Seamus Heaney* 141). In the first poem of "Lightenings" Heaney questions, "And after the commanded journey, what?" (*Seeing Things* 55). The images of the winter light and "a shivering beggar" illustrate chilly coldness as a bitter test in life:

Shifting brilliancies. Then winter light
In a doorway, and on the stone doorstep
A beggar shivering in silhouette.

So the particular judgement might be set:

Bare wallstead and a cold hearth rained into -

Bright puddle where the soul-free cloud-life roams.

(*Seeing Things* 55)

Here the sense of home and unity in communal life is absent. There is no longer the family hearth. The image of the wandering beggar displays that life is aimless and painful. The phrase "the cloud-life" reflects the drifting spirit (*Seeing Things* 55). Yet the beauty of a free soul that roams is merely a dream-like vision. For the commonplace sight of a "bright puddle" opposes the solace of the surreal dreams (*Seeing Things* 55). Then a flood of negations follows:

Nothing magnificent, nothing unknown.

A gazing out from far away, alone.

And it is not particular at all,

Just old truth dawning: there is no next-time-round.

Unroofed scope. Knowledge-freshening wind. (*Seeing Things* 55)

Heaney reflects self-justification in muted defeatism. "Nothing magnificent, nothing unknown" projects the crisis of nihilism. The speaker redresses that frustrations are "not particular at all." Although loaded with death temptations, the speaker asserts the self-containment that life is no "next-time-round" (*Seeing Things* 55). He proposes that living is an "enactment of all the bittersweet deferrals in between" (Heaney, *The Redress of Poetry* 173-174). In other words, the poet reveals that self-justification leads to experiences of the inevitable despair in life.

Aesthetics not only confronts self-abnegation, but also manifests the dialectic of forces that resist without relative logic. In fact,

Heaney's poems illustrate that the more absent the external determination to negate communal pressure, the more obvious the free spirit appears in the transformation of constraint into art. This achievement of negation, in the work of art appears free and appears to be internally complete without transcending the social mechanisms. In "Settings" poem xx the cleared space in Moscow's Red Square is "dizzying" (*Seeing Things* 76) and the speaker dreams of the freedom in flying:

The big cleared space in front was dizzying.
 I looked across a heave and sweep of cobbles
 Like the ones that beamed up in my dream of flying

Above the old cart road, with all the air
 Fanning off beneath my neck and breastbone.

(The cloud-roamer, was it, Stalin called Pasternak?)

(*Seeing Things* 76)

Here, Heaney exhibits the confrontation between Boris Pasternak (poet and author of *Doctor Zhivago*) and Joseph V. Stalin (premier of the U.S.S.R from 1941 to 1953). Pasternak's literary voice is politically useless. As a "cloud-roamer," Pasternak's language does not yield to serve politics (*Seeing Things* 76). He survives during Stalin's iron policies but does not compromise to write for politics.¹ In the poem Stalin's political power is manifested through the vast space in Red Square. The public space reveals his power to control society. This connection of power includes the vision of the bricks in the wall which indicate confinements to limit "people to behave well under, inside or outside" (*Seeing Things* 76). Yet, in the poem, art is justified from a significance of different space.

The space of art is in motion and forms a contrast to the freedom unrestrained by politics.

Hence, while the Red Square indicates the restrained public space, the dream image and Pasternak's "cloud-roamer" identity resist the gravity of political manipulations. The juxtaposition of Stalin and Pasternak projects an implied conflict between politics and art. In the poem Heaney caricatures how Pasternak performs aesthetic expressions relaxed from Stalin's tyrannical oppressions. His dream image of floating and a sense of lightness contrast with the military forces of segregation.² Heaney suggests "an inner freedom" is "the nugget of harmony" (*The Government of the Tongue* 87).³ He suggests that the distance in self-renunciation provides a space to search "for lost words." The self-obliteration thus becomes "an attempt to remember what is still to be brought into being" (83). In the circumstances of oppression, according to the metaphors of "Pasternak" and the motion of flying, art possesses the quality of something "astonishing" and irreconcilable (88).

According to this feature of aesthetic irreconciliation, Adorno suggests that art has its own independent role but it cannot exist without "universality and society" (Grodén 3). He argues that the voices of "I" in society and language "establish an inescapable relationship to the universal and to society" ("On Lyric Poetry and Society" 43). Adorno suggests language is the medium of concepts and "is itself something double": to reflect the "subjective impulses" (43) and also the universality "within the bounds of the poem and the infinite within the poem's finitude" (42). Adorno states that lyric poems present social

aspects because "language mediates lyric poetry and society in their inner-most core" (43). Poetry is not a mirror of the personal psyche. Adorno writes, "The less work thematizes relationship of "I" and society, the more spontaneously it crystallizes its own accord in the poems, the more complete this process of precipitation will be" (42).

In Terry Eagleton's essay about Adorno, he addresses the focus of irreconciliation: "Artefacts for Adorno are ridden with inconsistencies, pitched battles between sense and spirit, astir with fragments which stubbornly resist incorporation" (353). For Adorno, art is radical and transgresses the antagonism of everyday life. The distances of aesthetics from the contemporary political circumstances urge resistance against ideology. Art confronts the intolerability of social manipulation. To justify art is to reconstruct principles of organization different from "the law of an administered society" (Eagleton 353).

Heaney situates the conflicts of transcendence and non-transcendence through the bird-man character Sweeney. In Heaney's poem about Sweeney, the poet displays the conflict between separation from community and return to community. The legend about Sweeney's change into a bird implies Heaney's thoughts of being free from communal mechanisms and pressure. However, Heaney's Sweeney is ambivalent. Sweeney returns to the community in *Sweeney Astray* but in *Station Island* Sweeney is distant from the community. I suggest that the flight images paradoxically project the conflicts of communal reconciliation and non-reconciliation.

Sweeney, the historical character, undergoes an exiled life and conflicts of communal reconciliation. Heaney writes his *Station Island*

in the voices of Sweeney, and in the notes, the poet indicates that Sweeney is a violent king in the seventh century. He is cursed by St. Ronan and transformed into a bird-man living as an outcast of community in his exile to the woods. Exposed to the barbarous homeland, isolated from companions and family, and maddened by his uprooting, the Sweeney mask allows Heaney to disguise his turbulent emotions against the festering political values in Ireland. Like his historical figure's exile, Heaney moves to Glanmore, in the Republic of Ireland, leaves Northern Ireland during the severe political wars of the IRA in 1972. Henry Hart discusses the relationship between the hero and Heaney: "What emerges is a portrait of the divided, irascible Sweeney that is fundamentally a self-portrait of Heaney . . . Sweeney is the poet who bears witness to cultural affairs while declaring his independence from them" (138-139). The Sweeney / Heaney identity is torn between the bond of emancipation and social restraint. In *Sweeney Astray*, Sweeney's madness displays a climax that appears as a non-reconciliation with the world of external forces that suppress individuals. Sweeney perches on a tree and in solitude he laments:

My dark night has come round again.

The world goes on but I return

to haunt myself. I freeze and burn.

I am the bare figure of pain. (*Sweeney Astray* 70)

Here, Heaney deconstructs Sweeney's hallowed image as a tribal hero. The Sweeney persona is tortured in fear and is confused in senses and reason. As a ludicrous wild man, Sweeney is bound to his shattered mentality and the will of non-reconciliation. His untamed nature suffers in exile.

Sweeney's exile suggests withdrawal to a secluded outpost from the

community rather than espousing revolutions. Sweeney eventually returns to the community and communion.⁴ Here the theme of redemption is obvious; through madness and defeat, Sweeney wins his paradoxical victory of sanity, grace, and resurrection from union with the Eucharist:

To you, Christ, I give thanks

for your Body in communion.

Whatever evil I have done

in this world, I repent. (*Sweeney Astray* 83)

The confession reveals that the exile is a request for a final reconciliation with community. If Sweeney's madness presents a segregation from communal forces, it is also a punishment resulting from violations and blasphemies. Therefore, in a religious aspect, Sweeney is free from sin after returning to the Eucharist. Yet in terms of the social dimension, he ceases to negate the communal pressure. In fact, Sweeney is not freed; since his interventions provoke blasphemies, he fails to be free. Sweeney's afflicted soul in his madness cannot be reconciled with the community. His madness is immanently beyond the realm and suppressions of communities and religion.

Since Sweeney fails to attain the freedom according to his nature, we thus cannot regard him as a free spirit. In "Sweeney Redivivus" instead of the return to the Eucharist, Sweeney flies into a cave. Sweeney remains in conflict with the failure to be free. The failure to win a thorough freedom keeps the aesthetic thoughts in motion, and keeps it in conflict with society. The poet hints that Sweeney is not bound to the community, since the metaphysical comfort in communities gives no solace. In fact, Sweeney in *Station Island* suggests that the flight is a sort of

emancipation. Sweeney does not return to the community but keeps a distance from it.

In fact, through Sweeney's metamorphoses, the liberation in art simultaneously offers space to verify the absence of freedom in life. Sweeney's desire to be emancipated witnesses the continuation of its failure instead of the achievement of subjective freedom. Due to the symbolic movement to solidify the will of resistance, the stone and wall images suggest the spiritual fortress. Heaney asserts that the significance of the building image and "corroborating force" project the idea of a reformed culture. In poetry, "the symmetries and pointing of rhyme and stanza" serve as a foundation to construct the new cultural territory in writing. Hence, the conception of outlining the ideal society "naturally turns out to have the same structure as the ideal building or poem" (*The Government of the Tongue* 81). Heaney justifies the solid constructions of writing:

. . . the poem does proceed to concentrate its focus inward so that the fortress of stone passing in the fortress of words becomes finally a manifestation of the fortified mind, besieged yet ablaze, exalted and incontrovertible. (*The Place of Writing* 27)

From the aspect of subjectivity, the strong walls represent the symbolic fortress of self-absolution and a retreat into the art of writing. The significance of the building recalls Yeats' tower image from which the poet evaluates spiritual triumph over the historical context of social turmoil. Matthews writes, "The poems are ultimately therefore not about history but 'about artistic faith, about trusting images and emblems

rather than conventional images of the world, about holding fast, living in a fastness'" (170).

In *Seeing Things* Heaney is skeptical that life is a triumph over history and community. He examines ideas about inner-ness. In "Settings" poem xxii, Heaney doubtfully questions the retreat into spirituality. He asks the divisions of spirituality: "Where does spirit live? Inside or outside / Things remembered, made things, things unmade?" (*Seeing Things* 78). Poem xxii is composed of six questions and challenges the belief that to "retreat" inwards from sight leads to insight. The poet questions the "in-placeness" of spirituality and freedom (*The Government of the Tongue* 163). He is puzzled with the actual place and the real emancipation in life. In other words, the freedom he strives for in writing reflects that life is unfree. Tom Huhn states, "The artwork stands not just as testament but also as reminder of our unfreedom" (249). Indeed, within this absence, Heaney justifies that artists wrestle with restraints and anguish. He trusts that misery and negation buttress the effigy of poetry.

So far, since Sweeney's flight manifests the conflicts of liberation, his dives into the cave imply a search for a source. In the poem "On the Road," Sweeney flies to the cave and sees on the rock the pre-historical drawing of a deer. The sign of a deer drinking water suggests a quest for refreshment vouchsafed from the depth of despair:

For my book of changes
I would meditate
that stone-faced vigil

until the long dumbfounded
 spirit broke cover
 to raise a dust
 in the font of exhaustion. (*Station Island* 121)

In these verses, images like "votive granite" "stone faced vigil" and "font of exhaustion" reflect a dried source that is skeptical (*Station Island* 121). Like the rich young man in the Bible, Heaney asks in "On the Road": "Master, what must I / do to be saved?" (*Station Island* 119).⁵ In the poem, Heaney imagines himself as the archetypal figure of the person searching for purpose and meaning in life. The young man's question reveals a desire to seek the truth and the source of life. His asking Jesus for the ways "to be saved" reflects his feeling of anguish, fear and doubts in the world he lives. His skeptical mind corresponds to the cave image, the enclosed and dark domain, where the primitive instinct is hidden and strives for the light.

Thus, the drawing in the cave implies that the source of art is hidden and symbolically evaluated. Sweeney finds the image of a drinking deer in the rock and reflects human efforts to banish darkness. Like flowing water from rocks, art presents a proliferation of beauty and peace that differs from tribal convention. Water is allegorized and internalized. For instance, Moses' drawing water from the rock foreshadows Christ's perpetual power: "they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (1 *Corinthians* 10:4). Thus, the metaphorical source that is sprung from the rock suggests art is hidden but not exhausted.

Therefore, the image of a drinking deer suggests a source different

from tribal convention. The totem of the deer is related to the source of water and implies the refutation of the tribal laws, such as the predatory principles between the hunted and the hunter. The drinking deer reflects anxiety for the water source and rejection of the barbarous mechanisms of violence. Heaney writes that the outline of the deer is in a curve and hints at the shape of a circle and the cyclic power of nature. Indeed, the deer implies life; the descriptions of the "muzzle" and "nostril" suggest breathing and vitality of life:

There a drinking deer
 is cut into rock,
 its haunch and neck
 rise with the contours,

the incised outline
 curves to a strained
 expectant muzzle
 and a nostril flared

at a dried-up source. (*Station Island* 121)

The deer "at a dried-up source" and cut into the rock comments on the indissoluble bonds with solid restraints. Heaney implies that Sweeney's journey does not lead to emancipation, but his flight suggests a movement distant from communal oppression, and towards the source of life and art. The cave symbolizes a primitive zone untouched by influences from Christian communities, the light so-called from the outer world. To penetrate deep into the dark cave symbolizes a journey back to the source

(Andrews 183).

For Heaney, the image of water symbolizes a source, the power of nature and resistance. The writing of "omphalos" suggests standing against violence and offers its own different narrative and consciousness of stability:

I would begin with the Greek word, *omphalos*, meaning the navel, and hence the stone that marked the center of the world, and repeat it, *omphalos, omphalos, omphalos*, until its blunt and falling music becomes the music of somebody pumping water at the pump outside our back door. . . . There the pump stands, a slender, iron idol, snouted, helmeted, dressed down with a sweeping handle, painted a dark green and set on a concrete plinth, marking the centre of another world. (*Preoccupations* 17)

The omphalos suggests a restless power and vitality. The music of the water source reflects the art of poetic expressions. Darcy O'Brien says, "Heaney has made something miraculous of what anyone else would have counted for nothing . . ." (191). With the silence in seeing the symbol of a water pump, Heaney affirms writing as a vigorous power that is restless and resists mechanisms. The water image describes the generative power of life and signifies a difference from sectarian devastations.

Hence, Heaney's *Seeing Things* wrestles with movements of transgression and return. The vertical movements justify a sense of crossing from writing the "matter-of-fact" into the domain of speculation and the "imagined" (*The Redress of Poetry* xiii). "Lightenings" poem viii presents the two realms of facts and interpretations. This is a story

set in the Middle Ages. The monastic community in Clonmacnoise experiences the vision of a boat in the sky:

The annals say: when the monks of Clonmacnoise
 Were all at prayers inside the oratory
 A ship appeared above them in the air.

The anchor dragged along behind so deep
 It hooked itself into the altar rails
 And then, as the big hull rocked to a standstill,

A crewman shinned and grappled down the rope
 And struggled to release it. But in vain.

'This man can't bear our life here and will drown,'

The abbot said, 'unless we help him.' So

They did, the freed ship sailed, and the man climbed
 back

Out of the marvellous as he had known it. (*Seeing Things* 62)

Vendler writes that the two realms describe the knowledges from which people call "the practical and poetic" (*Seamus Heaney* 137). Corcoran regards the crossing as a process mixing differences: "The little miracle-tale, then, is emblematic of the way two orders of being - those of imagination and reality, or of religious faith and experience, or of poetry and event - may coexist and interdepend . . . on the recognition of, and fascination with, otherness" (*The Poetry of Seamus Heaney*, 168). In the poem, the flowing boat image transgresses domains by bringing the

marvellous to the phenomenal world. The movement in the poem suggests the return rather than a transcendence. Although the praying priests cannot resist glancing over the beauty and airiness of being free from earthly bounds, they return from a glimpse of the marvellous back to the phenomenal world. Indeed, this return is significant in writing, because the sense of release transgresses the phenomenal "matter-of-fact" world. Adorno states that the feeling of release is not transcendent but is related to frustrations and co-operation with social mechanisms. He illustrates that to create a distance from the phenomenal world is to reject social standards. He says, "The more individuals are really degraded to functions of the social totality as it becomes more systematized, the more will man pure and simple, man as a principle with the attributes of creativity and absolute domination, be consoled by exaltation of his mind" (qtd. in Jay 66).

In the final poem of "Squarings," the light symbolizes the transgression to trust in the senses. In the poem, "the sixth sense" suggests art going beyond the five senses (*Seeing Things* 108). The speaker celebrates the new continuity of the poetic language and states:

Seventh heaven may be

The whole truth of a sixth sense come to pass.

At any rate, when light breaks over me

The way it did on the road beyond Coleraine . . .

(*Seeing Things* 108)

With early evidence of human occupation, the city of Coleraine reflects that human history is a repeated materialistic sequence of mechanism.

Hence, the sixth sense mentioned in the poem resists socially formulated productions, such as sectarianism and persecutions, and refers to the human instinct that the other five sensations cannot reach. Through this spontaneous human instinct, the poet celebrates the gift of poetry "arising or descending beyond the poet's control" (*The Government of the Tongue* 163). Thus, the aesthetic transgression from social mechanisms asserts the suppressed spontaneity.

For Adorno, art transgresses communication. The manner in which art communicates with the outside world is paradoxically a lack of communication and alienation. The reason for non-communication, as in Adorno's thought, not only refers to the "fractured nature of art," but also "negates the conceptualization foisted on the real world" (*Aesthetic Theory* 7). He rejects the idea that art should function as a shallow communication between terminology and clichés. By opposing such a notion of receptivity as constant, Adorno justifies that art "communicates the uncommunicable":

The only way to get through to reified minds by means of art is to shock them into realizing the phoneyess of what a pseudo-scientific terminology likes to call communication. By the same token, art maintains its integrity only by refusing to go along with communication. The proximate motive for the hermetic procedure in poetry is of course the growing pressure to dissociate poetry from intentionality and subject matter. Originating in the domain of reflection, this pressure has expanded its reach to include poetry. (*Aesthetic Theory* 443)

The quoted passage illustrates that the awareness of distance disorders

thoughts. "But as soon as thought repudiates its inviolable distance and tries with a thousand subtle arguments to prove its literal correctness," Adorno stresses, "it founders" (*Minima Morala* 127). "Turning away" from a pressurized unity represents silent social disagreements. And the turning away is a presentation of disobedience. Adorno seeks judgements that could be "beyond the confines of a schematizing conformism" (Coles 39).

In poem xlvi of "Squarings," Heaney stresses the moments of awakesness rather than substituting the will to follow convention. He states, "At any rate, when light breaks over me / The way it did on the road beyond Coleraine . . ." (*Seeing Things* 108). The light shining on the road suggests an allusion to Saul, whose life was transformed in a moment on the road to Damascus. For him, a strong set of oppositions, like the accounts between Law / Grace, Works / Faith, Jew / Christian, blindness / sight, collapsed when he was struck by a great light (Josipovici 241).⁶

Paradoxically, seeing means to recognize the previous blindness. The metaphorical seeing is developed within the transformation of new self-justifications. In the Bible, the converted Paul's awakening stresses the pattern of exile and return: to find the inexhaustible source as the destination. This strong justification of faith corresponds to a strong denial of life; transformations are significant and crucially needed to reform life. Like the stubborn Saul denied Christianity, the sense of negation not only refers to sectarian hatred, but also expresses the violent distinctions between self and others. Heaney writes, "Me waiting until I was nearly fifty / To credit marvels" (*Seeing Things* 50).

The poet describes that to negate the social mechanism of thoughts and expressions is not enough. The light image stresses that the change occurs in moving from stubborn sectarian faith to heterogeneous values. Therefore, the experience of light evokes the thoughts of transgression and the world moving in constant of flux. Heaney pushes the trust of differences to the unexpected possibilities.

Nevertheless, the concept of contingency is not a release for Heaney, and movements recall conflicts in subjectivity. I thus want to say that the justification of freedom returns to the rooted experience of tribalism. In the poem, the "wind got saltier and the sky more hurried" signifies that the primitive and dynamic power of nature can never be exhausted (*Seeing Things* 108). The search for "what escaped me" under these conditions implies the endeavour to restore the roots of self and culture. Although the future tense in this self-promise states a prospective, instead of going forward, it is a process of retreat:

At any rate, when light breaks over me
 The way it did on the road beyond Coleraine
 Where wind got saltier, the sky more hurried

And silver lamé shivered on the Bann
 Out in mid-channel between the painted poles,
 That day I'll be in step with what escaped me.

(*Seeing Things* 108)

On the one hand, Heaney's relegation of poetic consciousness refers to a new promise "to be in step with"; on the other hand, it displays quietude about political reconciliation. The word "escaped" indicates the fugitive

self that no longer matches with solidarity callings. "To be step in with what escaped me" reflects that the self is torn between movements and is bounded with the confinements that he deliberately eludes (*Seeing Things* 108). In poetry, the split self suffers in "the predicament of the spirit" (*The Redress of Poetry* 184).

So far we have examined that Sweeney's flight to the cave suggests a new recognition of the primitive instinct of the human spirit. The drinking deer metaphorically reveals a source that the communal restraint cannot dominate. Heaney justifies the concept of crossing. The Clonmacnoise mystery suggests transgression from the phenomenal "matter-of-fact" realm and the allusions to St. Paul manifest trust in contingencies. However, by mentioning Coleraine, Heaney justifies that writing is not a pure release but brings back the chains of tribalism. He confronts again the predicament of spirit. Heaney states his trust in poetry, "I credit it ultimately because poetry can make an order true to the impact of the external reality and as sensitive to the inner laws of the poetic being as the ripples that rippled in and rippled out across the water in that scullery bucket fifty years ago" ("Crediting Poetry" 449-450). What Heaney suggests is the justification of a new sense of community. The "in-and-out" ripple effect asserts that the poetic identity is always in states of justification and skepticism to the world.

Hence Heaney's archaeologist-poetic identity questions the generalization of peace and terror, and justifies the significance of subjectivity. He rejects the task of criticism to search for the particular group. In "Station Island" poem VIII, Heaney shares a similar archeological task with Tom Delaney to explore the past and reconstruct

traces of diverse cultures. A gift from Delaney metaphorically expresses a promise overcoming the tense history of atrocity. From seeing the ghost of Tom Delaney, Heaney struggles to reconcile the contradictory images of brutality and peace. The imagery of a noble prioress contains balanced violence:

I could not speak. I saw a hoard of black
 basalt axe heads, smooth as a beetle's back,
 a cairn of stone force that might detonate,
 the eggs of danger. And then I saw a face
 he had once given me, a plaster cast
 of an abbess, done by the Gowran master,
 mild-mouthed and cowled, a character of grace.

(*Station Island* 82)

The verses suggest that Heaney is speechless when he witnesses the ancient implements, such as the stone axes juxtaposed with the graceful physiognomy of the prioress. Although through the image of the prioress, the artifact conveys tranquility and purity, the cairn of stone "that might detonate" hints at the power of destruction (*Station Island* 82). The fact is that the generalization of war and peace silences the poet's language. Poems in "Station Island" demonstrate that violence and the stereotyped sacredness in politics have power over humanity. Self-obliteration in social violence suggests abandonment of true selfhood. The consciousness to re-make the world for emancipation is futile.

In poetry, Heaney attempts to reformulate the relationships of self and others. As an archaeologist-poet, he writes poetry not merely to reproduce the world by exposing the deprivation in its determinative power.

Rather this community, in Heaney's words, manifests self and other "together as a dream-web which nets psyche to psyche" (*The Government of the Tongue* 159). From projecting a life-world, the justification of poetic language leads to a phase of association, and releases one's aim to expand alternatives in identities and self-justifications. Heaney indicates that writing poetry reveals "social relation and emotional persuasion" (163). He states that writing bridges human relationships and expresses a sense of understanding: "This represents the poetry of relation, of ripple-and-wave effect upon audience; at this point, the poet's art has found ways by which distinctively personal subjects and emotional necessities can be made a common possession of the reader's" (159).

Therefore, the sense of "order" and "law" that Heaney has examined in "Crediting Poetry" refers to a source founded on personal experiences and discrepancies (449-450). The negation of a unified selfhood strives to remove a center force. In "Squarings" poem vi and vii, Thomas Hardy experiences distress and joy. Playing dead in a field of sheep, Hardy supplicates the infinite, "He experimented with infinity. / His small cool brow was like an avail waiting / For sky to make it sing the perfect pitch / Of his dumb being . . ." (*Seeing Things* 60). Hardy's childhood experience of an imagined death leads him to feel the loneliness. Yet to partake in the game, he senses the joy of living. The experienced "infinity" creates the "ripple effect"; through this quasi-experience of death, Hardy justifies both delight and the emptiness in it. Even in the poet's old age, trust and doubt of the sources are original in his mind. This is to say, he still feels "the same ripple inside him" (*Seeing*

inside him" (*Seeing Things* 60).

As a matter of fact, the relationship between "the mind's center and its circumference" indicates the significance of the moving spaces in negations ("Crediting Poetry" 450). In poem vii, Hardy's experience is deconstructed and retold by Florence Emily. Instead of reciting childhood memories, Hardy reflects an experience of crossing:

Hardy sought the creatures face to face,

Their witless eyes and liability

To panic made him feel less alone,

Made proleptic sorrow stand a moment

Over him, perfectly known and sure.

And then the flock's dismay went swimming on

Into the blinks and murmurs and deflections

He'd know at parties in renowned old age

When sometimes he imagined himself a ghost

And circulated with that new perspective.) (*Seeing Things* 61)

The sense of dismay found in childhood forms the centrifugal effect of diffusion. The party image suggests the metaphorical gathering of human relationships in social life. With the familiar feeling of dismay, Hardy senses the emptiness and "imagines himself as a ghost" (*Seeing Things* 61). He struggles for a free spirit as its own living testimony to the fact that dissonance, like the sense of despair in the joyful party, situates the personal space in harmony with the outer. Hardy seeks the

clearance of a space that paradoxically associates with and hides from the public. "An art that knows its mind"--the centrifugal self-obliteration makes the negation of authorial intentions and controls; yet, the art simultaneously asserts that "solitude and distresses are creditable" ("Crediting Poetry" 467). Heaney is able to understand more than delusion of self and community. The concept of community is absent and the sense of emptiness rejects totalization of self and others.

In conclusion, a poet is not released but constructs new relationships with an aesthetic consciousness. In Heaney's poems, art justifies non-reconciliation with social mechanisms but is not emancipated from them. Adorno writes, "The modernity of art lies in its mimetic relation to a petrified and alienated reality. This, and the denial of that mute reality, is what makes art speak" (*Aesthetics Theory* 31). Aesthetics is not rooted in social restriction and also cannot be freed from it. Therefore, art speaks without purposes of communication. Adorno believes that art is transgressive but "must then be balanced by an 'immanent' (formal) critique of those contradictions internal to the work itself" (Grodin 283). The aesthetics of critical negations then are non-transcendent in society. For Heaney, poetry provides visions of the immanent self and preserves spaces that social mechanisms cannot restrain.

Notes

¹ Victor Erlich suggests that Pasternak "scorned *Lef's* excessive 'Sovietism' (*sovetskost'*), that is, 'it is depressive servility and prodilection for officially sanctioned rowdyism'" (258).

² Erlich quesitons the senses of joy and liberation in *Doctor Zhivago*:

It is a phenomenon with which many of us are familiar - a feeling of nearly joyous excitement that can grip a witness or a participant in a historical crisis in spite of the arduous hardships and looming dangers. It brings a strange sense of liberation from the routine, the habitual, the everyday, as one's condition is being stripped to bare essentials. Let me quote, not without some hesitation, Lara's musings in *Doctor Zhivago* a work which Akhmatova did not happen to care for. "Everything established, settled, everything to do with home and order and the common round, has crumbled into dust and been swept away in the general upheaval and reorganization of the whole society. The whole human way of life has been destroyed and ruined. And that's left is the bare, shivering human soul, stripped to the last shred." But is not one of the sources of this strange sense of uplift a feeling of having been made privy to large-scale and irreversible history events - a feeling which found its classical expression in the famous lines of the eminent nineteenth-century Russian poet Fyodor Tyutchev: "Blessed is he who visited this world / During its fateful moments"? (60-61)

³ In *The Government of the Tongue*, Heaney includes an essay about

the Russian writer Osip Mandelstam in "Osip and Nadezhda Mandelstam." Stalin oppressed Mandelstam and "attempted constraint on him to manufacture literature 'National in form, socialist in content'" (87). During five years of silence, Mandelstam refused to identify with Stalin's totalitarian regime.

⁴ Heaney states that the character of Sweeney represents religious tension:

. . . the literary imagination which fastened upon him as an image was clearly in the grip of a tension between the newly dominant Christian ethos and the older recalcitrant Celtic temperament. The opening section which recounts the collision between the peremptory ecclesiastic and the sacral king, and the closing pages of uneasy reconciliation set in St. Moling's monastery, are the most explicit treatment of this recurrent theme. (*Sweeney Astray* 2)

⁵ In The New Jerusalem Bible, the Gospel of Mark, the rich young man kneels before Jesus and puts this question to Him, "Good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" (10:17). In the Gospel of Matthew, the rich young man questions Jesus, "Master, what good deed must I do to possess eternal life?" (19:16).

⁶ Neil Corcoran argues that Heaney alludes to Anchises and projects the longing to see his father "face-to-face." This "face-to-face" meeting, reflects the biblical account of Saul's meeting with a strong light on the road, as well as other biblical passages:

The phrase is repeated elsewhere in the volume [*Seeing Things*] too, and it has biblical associations, notably to the first

epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians, in the famous passage on charity which reads, 'For now we see, through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then I shall know even as also I am known'; which is, of course, said of the way human beings may meet God after death, in a mutually self-revelatory encounter. (*The Poetry of Seamus Heaney* 167)